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## **The 'Power'-ful Trinity**

### **Abstract**

This paper proposes a new orthodox Latin Trinitarian model of the Trinity, through employing current work from the metaphysics of powers. It outlines theses defended within the contemporary powers literature that form the backbone of the account and then shows how they can be combined to provide an orthodox metaphysics of the Trinity. Having done this it addresses a further element required for orthodoxy, the ontological priority of the Father, and then notes a particular benefit that comes along with the model. The paper concludes by posing and answering some objections one might raise against the account.

## **The 'Power'-ful Trinity<sup>1</sup>**

'The Christian faith chiefly consists in confessing the holy Trinity',<sup>2</sup> writes Aquinas, since it is who Christians claim God is.<sup>3</sup> This paper proposes a new orthodox model for conceptualising the metaphysics of this doctrine, through employing work from the metaphysics of powers. It begins by first outlining the

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<sup>1</sup> A previous version of this paper was presented at Oxford University in a works in progress seminar to the members of the Metaphysics of Entanglement project, and I would like to thank them for all their valuable feedback. I also wish to thank Gregory Stacy, Ralph Walker, William Wood, Jonathan Hill, James Hanvey, & Anna Marmodoro for their insightful comments on an earlier draft.

<sup>2</sup> Aquinas, *De Rationibus Fidei*. c.1.

<sup>3</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus makes this clear writing, 'When I say God, I mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. *Oration* 45.4.

main tenants of an orthodox Trinitarian model, and proceeds by stating theses defended within contemporary powers literature that form the backbone of my account. With these theses stated I then show how they can be combined to provide one with an orthodox metaphysics of the Trinity. Having done this I address a further element required for orthodoxy, the ontological priority of the Father, and then note a particular benefit that comes along with my model. Finally, I conclude by posing and answering some objections one might raise against my account.

Before getting started however, one final preliminary remark is in order. Within Trinitarian literature a distinction is drawn between Latin Trinitarianism (henceforth LT) and Social Trinitarianism (henceforth ST). Some recent work has disputed such a historic distinction,<sup>4</sup> but since I take this distinction as referring to differing explanatory projects, its historicity need not concern me. I therefore follow Brian Leftow in thinking that,

ST takes the three Persons as in some way basic and explains how they constitute or give rise to one God. [...] [Whereas] LT takes the one God as in some way basic and explains how one God gives rise to three Persons.<sup>5</sup>

Since I think good reasons can be given for being sceptical that ST is able to provide an orthodox conception of the Trinity,<sup>6</sup> I offer a LT model which attempts to preserve a clear notion of the divine unity. My model should be seen

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<sup>4</sup> Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Brian Leftow, 'Two Trinities', *Religious Studies*, 46 (2010), 441-447 (p.441).

<sup>6</sup> Brian Leftow, 'Anti Social Trinitarianism', in *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*, ed. by Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Keith Ward, *Christ and the Cosmos* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

as a welcome addition to LT, since by contrast with ST, LT severely lacks possible models.

### Trinitarian Claims

Within Trinitarian theorising it is widely accepted that Orthodoxy requires us to embrace four claims:

1. There is one God
2. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God
3. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not identical
4. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are of one substance

Recently a number of models have been formulated to show the compatibility and consistency of these claims,<sup>7</sup> with some modelling the Trinity on the time travelling Rockette Jane,<sup>8</sup> the three-headed mythical dog Cerberus,<sup>9</sup> the bronze statue of the Greek goddess Athena,<sup>10</sup> and a single mental substance/soul.<sup>11</sup> Not content on missing out on all the fun of creating imaginative models, I wish to throw my hat into the ring by offering an alternative proposal, which makes use of elements of contemporary power metaphysics.

### Power Metaphysics

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<sup>7</sup> By model I mean to provide an account as to how these four claims could be jointly compatible or true.

<sup>8</sup> Brian Leftow, 'A Latin Trinity', *Faith and Philosophy*, 21 (2004), 304-33.

<sup>9</sup> William Lane Craig and James Porter Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp.575-95.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffery E. Brower and Michael C. Rea, 'Material Constitution and the Trinity', *Faith and Philosophy*, 22 (2005), 57-76.

<sup>11</sup> William Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Contemporary metaphysics and philosophy of science have been particularly interested in powers/dispositions/capacities/tendencies/potentialities,<sup>12</sup> where powers are property-like entities that have an essential causal role that cannot vary across possible worlds.<sup>13</sup> Powerful properties therefore differ from categorical properties, the other dominant position concerning the nature of properties, since categorical properties have a nature that is ‘self-contained, [and] distinct from the powers that they bestow.’<sup>14</sup> Consequently, unlike powers categorical properties have a causal role that can vary across possible worlds, and as such their identity is usually determined by quiddities. Since my Trinitarian model relies on powers, I shall list the theses I have raided from the power metaphysics literature. However, before doing so I should note that it is not my aim to defend these theses here, some of which are by no means universally accepted, but rather to show what can be achieved with them if one finds them viable. Due to this my project can be seen as showing that a coherent account of the Trinity can be given if these theses are correct, whilst also admitting that if they turn out to be false the account is un-illuminating.<sup>15</sup>

### Thesis 1: Some powers can exist without categorical properties

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<sup>12</sup> I use these terms synonymously.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Mumford, *Dispositions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); George Molnar, *Powers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Alexander Bird, *Nature's Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Anna Marmodoro, *The Metaphysics of Powers* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Ruth Groff and John Greco, *Powers and Capacities in Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Jonathan Jacobs, *Causal Powers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> David M. Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.69.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps theists will have further reason to adopt these theses apart from the arguments for them in the literature, if they agree that it provides a coherent Trinitarian account.

Thesis one holds that some powers can exist without being grounded in categorical properties. Pandispositionalists hold this in virtue of thinking all properties are powers, and as such there are no categorical properties.<sup>16</sup> However, I only require that some powers are not grounded in categorical properties and therefore one could hold to dualism, thinking both powers and categorical properties exist.<sup>17</sup> Since this thesis is prominent within the powers literature, and given that some have gone so far as to suggest that science reveals that most fundamental level of reality consists of bare powerful properties,<sup>18</sup> many will grant me this thesis's plausibility.

### Thesis 2: Some powers are multi-track<sup>19</sup>

Thesis two takes sides over a current debate within the powers literature, as to whether powers are single-track, have one manifestation, or multi-track, have more than one manifestation.<sup>20</sup> Prima facie warrant for siding with multi-trackers comes from everyday examples. For instance, Stephen Mumford thinks,

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<sup>16</sup> Bird; Stephen Mumford, *Laws in Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Simon Bostock, 'In Defence of Pan-Dispositionalism', *Metaphysica*, 9 (2008), 139-57.

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps one could hold to a dual-aspect theory like Heil, thinking all properties are both irreducibly powerful and categorical (what he terms qualitative). However, one would also have to hold that the qualitative nature of these properties is neither physical and/or structural so as to be compatible with my Trinitarian picture: John Heil, *The Universe As We Find It* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.82-83.

<sup>18</sup> Simon Blackburn, 'Filling in Space', *Analysis*, 50 (1990), 62-65 (p.63); Peter F. Strawson, 'Reply to Evans' in Z. van Straaten, ed., *Philosophical Subjects*, ed. by Zak van Straaten (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) p.280.

<sup>19</sup> Maybe one could formulate an alternative thesis through modifying Marmodoro's multi-stage powers so that single-trackers could get on board with my model. However, there may be difficulties in keeping the stages distinct and yet simultaneous. Due to space, I do not investigate this option any further here. Anna Marmodoro, *Aristotle on Perceiving Objects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp.125, 130-33.

<sup>20</sup> Unlike Vetter, I do not define multi-track as, 'has multiple stimulus conditions', but rather that one power X, can manifest in different ways, for instance by doing A, B, C, etc. Barbara Vetter, 'Multi-Track Dispositions', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 63 (2013), 330-52.

Being elastic [...] affords many different possibilities. [...] An ability to bounce (when dropped) is different from an ability to bend (when pressured) though both might reasonably be thought powers of something that is elastic, in virtue of its elasticity.<sup>21</sup>

John Heil suggests another example writing,

A ball's sphericity endows it with a power to roll. But it is also in virtue of being spherical that the ball has the power to make a concave, circular impression in a cushion, the power to reflect light so as to look spherical, the power to feel spherical to the touch.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps there are two types of multi-track powers, those with different qualitative manifestations, such as Heil's example above, and those with different quantitative manifestations, that is a varying intensity of the same manifestation type, such as the power rubber has to stretch to differing lengths.<sup>23</sup> My model will require a qualitative multi-track power, the more controversial type of multi-track powers. However, despite objections raised against these types of multi-track powers,<sup>24</sup> my thesis sides with Neil Williams' defence of them and his conclusion that,

The moral ought to be clear: we should treat powers as capable of being multi-track. That is not to suggest that they all are, but some or many could be that way. [...] Whether any powers are in fact multi-track is strictly beyond our epistemic ken. We are left with 'best guesses' about

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<sup>21</sup> Mumford, *Laws in Nature*, p.172.

<sup>22</sup> Heil, p.121.

<sup>23</sup> For potential difficulties with this distinction see: Neil E. Williams, 'Putting Powers Back on Multi-Track', *Philosophia* 39 (2011), 581-95.

<sup>24</sup> E. Jonathan Lowe, 'On the Individuation of Powers', in *The Metaphysics of Powers*, ed. by Anna Marmodoro (New York: Routledge, 2010).

the nature of powers, and these are extra-empirical, despite being guided by the sciences in question.<sup>25</sup>

Thesis 3: A power in actuality (or manifesting) is numerically the same power in potentiality (or yet to manifest), rather than some distinct power

This thesis holds with Anna Marmodoro that ‘there is no polyadic relation connecting a power in potentiality to its manifestation, since the manifestation is numerically the same power in a different state.’<sup>26</sup> This contrasts other accounts of powers which appear to hold that the manifestation of a power is a *new* power,<sup>27</sup> and instead holds that ‘an activated power is the very same power as the power in potentiality, but it is now manifesting’.<sup>28</sup> Yet the affirmation of my thesis is by no means novel, with Aristotle<sup>29</sup> and Aquinas<sup>30</sup> holding this view. With such a historical precedent and contemporary defence of this thesis, I shall also add it to my metaphysical toolkit.<sup>31</sup>

Thesis 4: Some powers always manifest

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<sup>25</sup> Williams, p.594.

<sup>26</sup> Anna Marmodoro, ‘Aristotelian Powers at Work’, in *Putting Powers to Work*, ed. by Jonathan Jacobs (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p.65.

<sup>27</sup> Bird, p.107; Stephen Mumford and Rani L. Anjum, *Getting Causes From Powers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.5; Mumford, *Laws in Nature*, p.171.

<sup>28</sup> Marmodoro, *Aristotle on Perceiving*, p.20.

<sup>29</sup> Charlotte Witt, *Ways of Being* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp.38-58; Marmodoro, *Aristotle on Perceiving*, p.13.

<sup>30</sup> *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 11 co.; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 45 n. 3; *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 54 a. 1 co.

<sup>31</sup> One reason for adopting this view is since it provides a good answer to the always packing never traveling argument against powers, which says if a manifestation of a power results in another power then there is never any motion since there is no movement from potency to act, rather all we have is one potency after another. Armstrong, p.80.



Thesis four holds that some powers always manifest, such that there are no conditions where they are only ready to manifest.<sup>32</sup> A number of power theorists hold there to be such powers with William Bauer, for instance, writing that ‘while F does not nearly manifest all it is capable of at any given time, F does manifest some of its power thereby continuously existing’.<sup>33</sup> Marmodoro provides an example from contemporary physics of these types of powers suggesting,

the power of electric charge of an electron is always exercising as a wave that generates an electric field. There are no electric charges which are in potentiality, i.e. not giving rise to an electric field, although the field may not be interacting with anything in its environment.<sup>34</sup>

Given that this thesis has pretty widespread support within the literature, I shall make use of a modified version of it, which I shall further explicate later.

Thesis 5: Some powers are individuated and identified by their manifestations only

The final thesis holds that even though powers are usually individuated and identified by their stimulus conditions and manifestations, some powers are individuated and identified by their manifestations alone. One reason for holding

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<sup>32</sup> These powers could perhaps be the building blocks of reality due to their constant actuality and therefore presumably preclude the need for categorical properties to do this.

<sup>33</sup> William A. Bauer, (2012) ‘Four Theories of Pure Dispositions’, in *Properties, Powers, and Structures*, ed. by Alexander Bird, Brian Ellis and Howard Sankey (New York: Routledge, 2012), p.157.

<sup>34</sup> Anna Marmodoro, ‘Power Mereology: structural versus substantial powers’, in *Philosophical and Scientific Perspectives on Downward Causation*, ed. by Michele Paolini Paoletti and Francesco Orilia (New York: Routledge, 2017), p.113-114.

this is due to thesis four, which held that some powers manifest in all conditions, even if there is only a single power in existence. If we had to include the stimulus conditions within the identity of these powers, they would have to list every possible state of affairs, something that appears impossible.<sup>35</sup> However, perhaps by drawing a distinction between constitutive and epistemic identity criteria we could say that even though we can never epistemically articulate all the stimulus conditions of these powers, we can still provide the stimulus condition ‘any state of affairs’ as their constitutive identity criteria. Supposing this move is acceptable, then I also can work with this thesis, that some powers have constitutive identity criteria whose stimulus conditions are ‘any state of affairs’.

These theses provide me with a power based metaphysical toolkit, and it is with these tools that I formulate my Trinitarian model.

### Multi-Track Trinity

Employing the first thesis I hold that there is one power trope that has no categorical base, where I specify this to be a trope since tropes are unrepeatable individual properties, and I don’t want there to be any further instances of this type of power.<sup>36</sup> I suggest we take this purely powerful property to be a property God possesses, that of deity, the property which makes God divine. This should be relatively uncontroversial since powers are usually taken to be properties, but

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<sup>35</sup> This thesis has been argued for on other grounds not discussed here: Barbara Vetter, *Potentiality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), ch.3.

<sup>36</sup> Mann makes a similar move in his defence of Divine Simplicity by suggesting God is a causal power, although he doesn’t flesh this out in much detail. William E. Mann, ‘Simplicity and Properties: A Reply to Morris’, *Religious Studies*, 22 (1986), 343-353 (pp.352-353).

here I want to challenge the thought that deity is only a property. For instance, Brian Leftow writes,

Perhaps deity is not a property. Aquinas held that God is identical with His nature (*ST* Ia 3, 3). If He is, 'God' and 'deity' refer to the same thing. If they do, either God is a property or deity is not a property.<sup>37</sup>

Not everyone will be willing to embrace this thought, that God is a property, even though a number of theists have endorsed it.<sup>38</sup> One worry here is that properties require bearers, and thus the property deity would also seemingly require a bearer. However, one could suggest that we follow those who think there are free-floating tropes that do not require bearers, where tropes are more fundamental than the entities they compose.<sup>39</sup> Alternatively perhaps one could say that the deity trope has itself as its bearer. In either case the trope deity will not depend on anything else for its existence, but rather has an independent existence.

Perhaps instead we could suggest that deity, a power existing without any categorical grounding, shouldn't be thought of as a property at all, but rather a substance. One reason for thinking this might be as follows. Descartes defines a substance as, 'a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing

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<sup>37</sup> Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) p.136, n.3.

<sup>38</sup> Mann; William F. Vallicella, 'Divine Simplicity: A New Defence', *Faith and Philosophy*, 9 (1992) 508-525.

<sup>39</sup> Keith Campbell, *Abstract Particulars*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Kathrin Koslicki 'Questions of Ontology', in *Ontology after Carnap*, ed. by Stephan Blatti and Sandra Lapointe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.224-238.

for its existence'.<sup>40</sup> Given this definition we can say that the pure power deity is a substance, rather than a property, since it depends upon nothing else for its existence, with this becoming clearer after we apply thesis four. Since similar moves can be made even if one employs contemporary definitions of substance,<sup>41</sup> it seems to me that we can quite plausibly speak of the pure power deity as a substance.

If you dislike this option, then perhaps we can instead follow Aquinas and place God beyond the substance-attribute dichotomy. We can then embrace the thought that due to God's transcendence, it is 'Far better to say that God is metaphysically *sui generis*, and that there is nothing further to be said about the ontological category to which God belongs.'<sup>42</sup> My pure power deity then, could be thought of along these lines, as something modelled on a power, yet being of some *sui generis* ontological category.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, supposing you are hard to please and dislike this approach too, then I suggest you interpret '*ousia*' and '*substantia*' as referring to the general category 'entity'. Doing this allows us to say that the pure power trope deity is an entity and so too is God, where these turn out to be numerically identical with each other. Thesis one, therefore, seems to be applicable to God, and can be understood in one the ways I have suggested, either where God is a property,

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<sup>40</sup> Descartes. *Principles of Philosophy* (I. 51), in *Descartes Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. by John Cottingham et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.177.

<sup>41</sup> E. Jonathan Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.158; Heil, p.42.

<sup>42</sup> Graham Oppy, *Describing Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014), p.103; Leftow, *God and Necessity*, p.306.

<sup>43</sup> Whatever ontological category this is, it will refer to whatever is meant by '*ousia*' in the Nicene Creed and '*substantia*' in the Athanasian Creed.

substance, a *sui generis* kind, or entity. Nevertheless, whatever option one takes I will continue to speak of powers as properties since they are usually talked of as such, but this must be taken as a *façon de parler*, where what is really meant is one of the options spelled out here. With all this said, I shall assume Aquinas is correct meaning that God and deity refer to the same thing, and thus that God = the power trope deity.

Nevertheless, perhaps you just don't like the claim that deity is a power and therefore reject my model before it has gotten started, since you say God is a person. Three responses can be given to this. The first is to issue a reminder, stating that all I am proposing here is a metaphysical model as to how to think about the Trinity. One must remember that models only depict/image/mirror reality, but are never identical to reality itself, and as such they shouldn't be taken to represent reality perfectly in every way. My use of powers, then, need not be thought of as univocally applying to God, but could instead be thought of as analogical. All I require is that God has some features similar to powers. Secondly, I appeal to historic considerations where a move like this, at least according to some commentators, was made by Aquinas when he identified God as *actus purus*.<sup>44</sup> Just as a power's nature has something to do with being causal and active, Aquinas holds that 'God is pure activity.'<sup>45</sup> As Fergus Kerr writes, for Aquinas 'God's nature *is* activity – though activity with a certain 'subsistency'.<sup>46</sup> Yet this is very similar to my conception of God as a pure power, where this

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<sup>44</sup> Rogers argues that act and personhood are compatible. Katherin A. Rogers, 'The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity', *Religious Studies*, 32 (1996), 165-86 (p.172).

<sup>45</sup> Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, a.1, obj.3. in, (2014) 'Disputed Questions on Virtue', in *Thomas Aquinas: Basic Works*, ed. by Jeffery Hause and Robert Pasnau (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014), p.503.

<sup>46</sup> Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p.190.

power, as I have just sought to show, plausibly has some type of 'subsistency'.<sup>47</sup> Finally, some have made a distinction within philosophy of religion between classical theism and theistic personalism,<sup>48</sup> where theistic personalism holds that personhood is the basis from which God should be conceptualized.<sup>49</sup> Classical theists, however, reject this starting point and suggest that even though God possesses personal attributes, e.g. intellect and will, he should not primarily be conceptualized on being a person, since this anthropomorphizes him, but rather as being metaphysically ultimate, where this usually results in God being *actus purus*. With this distinction, one can place my account within the classical theistic tradition, where personhood is not primary. Given all this, it seems I have some fairly good justification for my starting point, particularly given the venerable tradition of God conceived as pure act.

Applying thesis two, that some powers are multi-track, we come to hold that the power deity has more than one manifestation. One will be unsurprised to know that I take deity to have three manifestations, merely because the Trinity comprises three persons. I follow Aquinas here in thinking that knowledge of God as three persons comes from divine revelation rather reason,<sup>50</sup> and as such I am sceptical of attempts to show by argument that there must be three persons within the Trinity.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, if these arguments are successful they

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<sup>47</sup> I'm not claiming that Aquinas thought of God as a power, but rather that there are aspects of his thought that closely resemble mine.

<sup>48</sup> Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.9-14; David B. Hart, *The Experience of God* (Michigan: Yale University Press, 2013), p.127.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp.1, 104-105.

<sup>50</sup> Aquinas, *De Trinitate*. q.1 a.4. co.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.170-191; Sarah Coakley, 'Why Three? Some Further Reflections on the Origin of the Doctrine of the

strengthen my case, since they will provide some plausibility to the claim that deity only has three manifestations. However, unfortunately currently the only reason I have for there being three manifestations is that the creeds have it that way. Integrating this thesis with the first means there are three different manifestations to the power deity, a power not grounded in any categorical property.

Through employing thesis three, that a power in potentiality is numerically the same power as it in actuality, we get the result that each manifestation of deity, deity in actuality, is the same as deity when it is not manifesting, deity in potentiality.<sup>52</sup> Using Heil's example of an electron's negative charge being multi-track,<sup>53</sup> we can say that the repelling of other electrons, attracting positrons, and responding to a Geiger counter are all just aspects of the electron's negative charge being in actuality. Thus, repelling other electrons is an electron's negative charge in actuality, the attracting of positrons is an electron's negative charge in actuality, and making a Geiger counter respond is an electron's negative charge in actuality. Yet presumably these are not the same manifestations, the repelling of an electron is not the same action as the attracting a positron or the making a Geiger counter respond. The closest analogue to this thought concerning deity and its three manifestation tracks, is Leftow's idea that there are three

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Trinity', in *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, ed. by Sarah Coakley and David Pailin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.29-56.

<sup>52</sup> As I go onto show, I don't ever think deity is found in a state of potentiality, but in order to illustrate the account, and due to needing a thesis like this, I plead one to bear with me in thinking about this counterpossible.

<sup>53</sup> Heil, p.121.

simultaneous life streams in God,<sup>54</sup> whereas we will go on to see these tracks also manifest simultaneously.

Summarising so far, there is one multi-track pure power deity trope which has three manifestations, and yet whilst each manifestation is different all the manifestations are deity in actuality, such that if you pointed to the first manifestation you would say, 'that's deity', if you pointed to the second manifestation you would say, 'that's deity', and if you pointed to the third manifestation you would say, 'that's deity'. Since these are the only manifestations of deity, all of these add up to God's life. The result of my proposal thereby makes possible Leftow's claim that the 'three divine Persons are at bottom just God: they contain no constituent distinct from God. The Persons are in some way God three times over.'<sup>55</sup> On my conception there is one trope deity, which is God, and the manifestations of the multi-tracks are just deity in actuality three times over.

Applying thesis four, that some powers always manifest, gives us the result that deity is a power that manifests its three tracks continually since it is always in a state of actuality. However, as mentioned previously, I require a slightly modified version of this thesis since deity must necessarily rather than always manifest. Plausibly I might have a power to become angry which manifests whenever I'm around someone, say my conjoined twin. Yet because I cannot separate from my conjoined twin this power is always in actuality. Nevertheless, we don't think

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<sup>54</sup> Leftow, 'A Latin Trinity', pp.312-313.

<sup>55</sup> Brian Leftow, 'Modes without Modalism', in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. by Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.357.



this power necessarily manifests, rather it only contingently manifests despite it never ceasing. Deity, however, does not contingently manifest, but necessarily manifests. I therefore take deity to be a power that is purely actual, such that it necessarily manifests, and thus no conditions are required to actualize this power since it is always, eternally, manifesting. Because of this there is no answer to the question, ‘when could deity manifest one of its multi-tracks?’ since deity is purely actual and as such cannot but manifest in its threefold way. Deity just is the manifestation in three distinct ways, and there are no possible conditions such that it ceases to manifest in these three ways.

It is important to see that this is different from other worldly powers, for instance the power of an electron’s negative charge, since conditions are required in order that this manifest one of its multi-track’s, such as the power to repel, or attract. Further, the power of an electron’s negative charge also illustrates what it means for a power to have different states, being in potency or act. Yet deity never experiences differing states since there is necessarily no time when this power is in potency, since it is always and continuously in actuality and therefore manifesting. The result of this is that for deity there is no alternative state other than eternally manifesting in a threefold way. We might come to think of this move made by thesis four, as somewhat analogous to Aquinas’s thought that God’s essence is his existence,<sup>56</sup> since it is just the essence of deity to eternally manifest in a threefold way in every possible situation.

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<sup>56</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, q.3, a.4.

Thesis five has pretty much already been applied, since I have stressed that there are no specific conditions required for deity to manifest in its threefold way. Since these multi-track manifestations are just the same power, deity in actuality, this power is not individuated by its manifestation conditions but by its manifestations. What then are the manifestations of deity? They are the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each of these manifestations, however, is just the power deity in actuality, and as such Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all equally deity in actuality.

How then do the manifestations differ, such that they are distinct manifestations, thus allowing deity to be multi-track? Multi-track powers typically only have different manifestations due to interacting with differing power partners. Hence an electron acts in different ways when it is met with the power negative charge, positive charge, or a Geiger counter. It is the differing manifestation conditions that make the differing tracks manifest (or actualize). Yet, as I have emphasized, in the case of deity no differing manifestations conditions are required to make deity manifest in a threefold way, rather deity necessarily does. How then are we to make sense of this?

One option would be to appeal to divine transcendence again, claiming deity is a *sui generis* type of multi-track power that doesn't require any distinct manifestation conditions for the manifestation of the three tracks. However, this is a weak response, and it would be good if we could do better. Perhaps instead we should say that the manifestation conditions of deity do change due to the manifestations of each of the individual tracks. We could then say that part of the

stimulus conditions for the second track is the manifestation of the first track, and the stimulus conditions for the third track is the manifestation of the first and second tracks. The differing manifestation conditions would then denote the different manifestations of deity and hence the different persons, where this will be analogous to those theologians who took the divine persons to be distinguished by their relations of origin.<sup>57</sup>

Orthodoxy has it that the Father is in some way the source of the Son and Spirit, and therefore we can say that the first manifestation track of deity manifests as the Father, where this manifestation occurs necessarily given any conditions and as such is individuated by its manifestation alone, as per thesis five. Since the Son in some way depends upon the Father, we can say that his stimulus condition is the manifestation of the Father, the first track. Therefore, since the Father is necessarily manifesting in the first track, the Son necessarily manifests in the second track, since the Son's stimulus conditions have been met. Given that the manifestation conditions are now once again different, we can say that the third track, the Spirit, has as its stimulus conditions the manifestation of the Father and Son, the first and second track. Given that these two are manifesting the Spirit also manifests in the third-track. One might be concerned that Eastern Orthodoxy cannot buy into this account since the third track requires that the Father and Son manifest and hence there seems to be some type of reliance on the Son as well as the Father for the manifestation of the Spirit rather than the Father alone. However, this worry can be overcome if a distinction can be made

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<sup>57</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.27; Augustine, *De Trinitate* V, 5; Anselm, *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, 2.

between stimulus conditions and ontological dependence, where one can say that the Son only changes the stimulus conditions such that the Spirit manifests, yet ontologically we can say the Spirit fully depends upon the Father.<sup>58</sup> Despite their being distinct stimulus conditions for the three manifestations they will still turn out to be necessary, eternal, and simultaneous, which is of vital importance since these are requirements for orthodoxy.

Questions, however, might be asked of me as to whether this answer has sacrificed orthodoxy for consistency, since now the Father alone appears to be *a se* whilst the Son and Spirit are not.<sup>59</sup> It seems to me, however, that this type of questioning is one that anyone who tries to explain the priority within the Trinity is liable too, and so perhaps I can just reply that I am no worse off than anyone else. However, other answers to these types of concerns can be given, where Mark Makin has done the most to answer this form of objection. In short, one approach would be too

invoke the accepted distinction between the divine essence (*ousia*) and the person (*hypostasis*) [...] [and] maintain that the Son possesses aseity with respect to the divine essence, but not with respect to his person. [...] Admittedly, the Son does not possess aseity with respect to his person, as opposed to the Father, [...] But it is not at all clear that this difference entails that the Son is not fully divine.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Something I will address further shortly.

<sup>59</sup> Craig appeals to this as justification for bypassing the need of explaining the priority relations within the Trinity. Craig and Moreland, p.594.

<sup>60</sup> Mark Makin, 'God from God: The Essential Dependence Model of Eternal Generation', *Religious Studies* (forthcoming).

Makin goes onto provide answers to further rejoinders to this type of response, but suffice to say I take this objection to my view to be surmountable and one all defenders of orthodoxy need to deal with.

My view then, can be seen as following Leftow's thought that

what distinguishes God the Father from God the Son is simply which act God is performing. God the Father is God fathering. God the Son is God filiating, or being fathered. The Persons simply are God as in certain acts-- certain events-in His inner life.<sup>61</sup>

In my terminology, the one power deity that is eternally manifesting, manifests in one track as the Father fathering, in the second track as the Son filiating or being fathered, and in the third track as the Holy Spirit spirating, where there is no possible world in which these simultaneous manifestations do not occur at all times. Thus, my model holds with Thomas Weinandy that 'the persons of the Trinity are not nouns; they are verbs and the names which designate them – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – designate the acts by which they are defined.'<sup>62</sup> If one asks me the further question as to what the persons on my account are, I once again follow Leftow in thinking 'the right answer is that they are whatever sort God is- the Persons just *are* God, as the Latin approach will have it. The Persons have the same trope of deity.'<sup>63</sup> This is by no means as informative as many people would like, however since the notion of personhood is much disputed within both philosophy and theology, with some Trinitarians such as

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<sup>61</sup> Leftow, 'Latin Trinity', pp.315-316.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), pp.118-119.

<sup>63</sup> Leftow, 'Latin Trinity', p.314.

Barth and Rahner rejecting this terminology altogether,<sup>64</sup> I am not much concerned by leaving this element of my model vague.

Summarising, my model holds that there is a single powerful deity trope that isn't grounded in any categorical property, and further that deity is a multi-track power that has essentially three manifestation tracks.<sup>65</sup> Since I hold that a power manifesting (in actuality) is numerically the same power as when it is waiting to manifest (in potentiality), the manifestation of deity, even though multi-track, is just deity in actuality. I further claim that deity is a pure power that constantly manifests, thereby being purely actual, such that it could never fail to manifest in any possible world. Therefore, deity in actuality just is the manifesting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Finally, I claim the distinctions between the manifestations are due to the relations between each manifestation, since if the manifestations were wholly identical we would have to hold that deity is single-track rather than multi-track. This outline of my model seemingly captures everything the Creed of the Council of Toledo affirms when it says,

although we profess three persons, we do not profess three substances, but one substance and three persons [...] they are not three gods, he is one God. [...] Each single Person is wholly God in Himself and [...] all three persons together are one God.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, there is a further complication of orthodoxy that I now seek to address.

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<sup>64</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I.1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936), p.359; Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (London: Burns & Oates Limited, 1970), p.109.

<sup>65</sup> Perhaps we can remove the trope-ish nature by following Leftow's argument, which concludes that, 'God is the whole ontology for *God is divine*.' See: Leftow, *God and Necessity*, pp.305-308.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in: Leftow 'Latin Trinity', p.304.

## The Priority of the Father

Whilst I have used the priority of the Father in my explanation of the changing stimulus conditions for the three manifestation-tracks of deity, I am still yet to explain the Father's priority relating to ontological dependence. Since many today take this type of priority as causal, something affirmed by both Catholic and Orthodox theologians,<sup>67</sup> I shall suggest how my model can account for this.

In order to do this, I will make use of the notion of grounding, where grounding is understood as a relation of generation or determination. Grounding is also typically taken to be non-reductive,<sup>68</sup> irreflexive, asymmetric, and transitive, which will be important for our notion of priority.<sup>69</sup> An example, however, provides the easiest way of understanding what grounding is thought to be. The singleton set 1 (from now on {1}) is plausibly grounded in the number 1, since the existence of 1 explains the existence of {1}. Further, since Grounding has been taken by some to be akin to metaphysical causation, this gives us further reason to think that it might be useful in explicating the causal priority within the Trinity.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Kallistos M. Ware, 'The Holy Trinity: Model for Personhood-in-Relation', in *The Trinity and an Entangled World*, ed. by John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p.116; Giles Emery, *The Trinity: an introduction to Catholic doctrine on the triune God* (Washington: The Catholic University Press of America, 2011), p.121.

<sup>68</sup> Kit Fine, 'The Question of Realism', *Philosophers' Imprint*, 1 (2001), 1-30 (p.15).

<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Schaffer, 'On What Grounds What', in *Metametaphysics*, ed. by David Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.376.

<sup>70</sup> Jonathan Schaffer, (2016) 'Grounding in the image of causation', *Philosophical Studies*, 173 (2016) 49-100; Alastair Wilson, 'Metaphysical Causation', *Noûs* (2017).

Employing the notion of ground, we can say that the Father, grounds the Son such that if there were no Father there would be no Son, and yet since there is the Father there must be the Son. A similar story could be told regarding the Holy Spirit, where either the Father alone, or the Father and Son ground the Holy Spirit. Utilising grounding's formal features we can say that the Father immediately and fully grounds the Son and, depending on one's theology, that the Father mediately and fully grounds the Holy Spirit, or that the Father and Son immediately and each partially ground the Holy Spirit.<sup>71</sup> We can further hold that the Father is absolutely fundamental and ungrounded, since nothing else explains his existence, since he just is the first track of deity in actuality. Thus, it seems we have a way to spell out the ontological priority found within the Trinity.

There is, however, a potential problem. If we take numbers to be abstractions, then 'we see that, of logical necessity, the natural numbers exist provided anything at all exists'.<sup>72</sup> Therefore once the first track of deity manifests as Father, you also have numbers, and hence the Father grounds numbers. But do we want to say that the Father grounds the Son with the same type of necessity as he grounds numbers? If we don't mind, this worry is adverted, however if this is a concern then we can either question the account of numbers presupposed, or suggest that deity, the three manifestations, jointly ground numbers rather than the Father alone. This second response, however, doesn't look particularly promising since there seems no reason why the individual tracks couldn't

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<sup>71</sup> For explanation of these features: Kit Fine, 'Guide to Ground', in *Metaphysical Grounding*, ed. by Fabrice Correia and Benjamin Schnieder (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>72</sup> Lowe, *Possibility of Metaphysics*, p.226.



themselves ground numbers. A final response denies that grounding is univocal, and therefore claims there are different strengths of grounding, such that the Father more firmly grounds the Son than he does numbers, or vice versa.<sup>73</sup> This I suggest, would be accepted by the Nicene theologians who ‘came to agree that this act of generation [in my terminology grounding] is unique: it fits into no category of generation that we know—however much we can make use of very distant likeness in the created order.’<sup>74</sup> Yet this option won’t satisfy some metaphysicians and therefore they must either ignore this concern or hold to a different view of numbers.

If one doesn’t like my grounding suggestion for accounting for the ontological dependence within the Trinity, an alternative would be to follow Makin’s essential dependence model, where ‘eternal generation is a form of rigid essential dependence [...] [such that] the Son is eternally begotten of the Father =*df.* The Father is a constituent of a real definition of the Son, and the Son exists eternally.’<sup>75</sup> Using this framework one can then provide an equally appropriate definition of essential dependence for the Holy Spirit, which could be altered for Orthodox or Catholic accounts. Whichever type of account one prefers, grounding or essential dependence, my multi-track Trinity can accommodate either. However, it should be noted that neither account spells out how the relations between the persons arise, but rather only describes their ontological priority. If asked how these arise I follow William Hasker in thinking, ‘the best

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<sup>73</sup> This could answer Makin’s concern that the relations of generation and procession would not differ on a grounding model. Makin, ‘God from God’.

<sup>74</sup> Lewis Ayres, ‘Augustine on the Trinity’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. by Giles Emery and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.124

<sup>75</sup> Makin, ‘God from God’.

reply is that no further explanation can be given; at least no one has ever succeeded in providing an illuminating explanation.’<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, despite leaving the person generating relations as somewhat mysterious, I hope to have shown that my model has resources to account for the priority within the Trinity.

### How many ...?

Having given my model, I wish to highlight a particular benefit of my account concerning how many streams of consciousness and sets of omni-attributes my account allows for. Starting with the divine consciousness, should we think there is ‘one wholly integrated divine consciousness and will with three necessary, inseparable, and complementary modes of activity’,<sup>77</sup> as theologians like Barth and Rahner did?<sup>78</sup> Or should we take McCall’s advice that ‘Trinitarian theology should insist on an understanding of persons [...] as distinct centres of consciousness and will who exist together in loving relationships of mutual dependence’,<sup>79</sup> thus thinking there are three distinct consciousnesses as Moltmann and Pannenberg did?<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps we needn’t worry about choosing here, since one of the benefits of my model is that it can accommodate either position. On the single consciousness view, we can say consciousness is linked to deity, and since there is only one deity trope, there is only one consciousness that is possessed by the three

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<sup>76</sup> Hasker, p.220; Leftow thinks likewise: Leftow, ‘Latin Trinity’, p.314.

<sup>77</sup> Ward, p.242.

<sup>78</sup> Barth, p.351; Rahner, pp.103-115.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism?* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2010), p.236.

<sup>80</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* vol.1. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), pp.300-319.

manifestations. Thus, although the manifestations are distinct, they are not so distinct as to lack sharing anything, where perhaps part of what they share is the singular consciousness. Nonetheless, if one prefers thinking that there are three consciousnesses, one for each person, my model can account for this by suggesting that each of the three tracks of deity simultaneously manifest partly as distinct consciousnesses, where one is had by each of the tracks. Which position should be preferred is not for me to judge here, however since my model allows for both it should be deemed acceptable by either camp.

For omni-attributes a similar response can be given, since my model needs to account for each person possessing the same attributes, that of being almighty, eternal, and uncreated, as affirmed in the creeds. Again, my model can say either that there is only one set of attributes, shared by the manifestations, or that there are three sets of identical attributes. Beginning with the first option, one can mimic Leftow in holding that for 'LT, all deifying attributes primarily belong to God, the sole substance of the Trinity. God is equally the 'substrate' of all Persons he constitutes or all events of his cognitive and affective life. So his deifying attributes exist equally in all three Persons.'<sup>81</sup> Hence, on my view all deifying attributes belong to deity, and since each of the persons just is a multi-track manifestation of deity, all the attributes of deity, other than the relations which make the manifestations distinct, belong to each person. However, one could take the second option by employing another thesis defended a number of power theorists who claim that an activated power may cause further powers to come about. In this case since the manifestation of powers bring about further powers,

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<sup>81</sup> Leftow, 'Anti Social Trinitarianism', p.87.

what will be brought about in this instance are distinct omni-attributes for each manifestation track. Again, I do not judge here which option is to be preferred, but just note that my account allows for either.

### Potential Problems

There may, however, be potential problems looming for my account. Rejecting one of the five theses explicated above would render my account useless since it relies on these. As explained previously, this isn't the place to defend these theses, and therefore my account should be taken to counterfactually propose, if these theses are true then I can give a coherent account of the Trinity, where this paper has sought to show the consequent, something I still deem a significant and worthwhile endeavour.

A second concern comes from thinking there is an unwanted item within my ontology, deity, which might be thought to give me a Quaternity rather than a Trinity. I think this worry is misplaced, since on my view deity just is the three manifestation tracks in actuality and is nothing distinct from these. This is evident through thesis three which holds, power X in actuality is the same power as power X in potentiality. Further, since deity cannot but manifest, deity is never in potentiality but always in actuality, and therefore there is nothing to deity other than its three simultaneous continual manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The final concern for my model is that it is modalistic. This might seem especially so since it uses the term ‘manifestation’, and some explications of modalism employ this exact phraseology. For instance, Giles Emery writes, modalists see ‘only *modes* of manifestation of the same one God. The same God manifests himself sometimes as Father, sometimes as Son (in the incarnation), sometimes as Holy Spirit (in the Church).’<sup>82</sup> Likewise Hugh Turner suggests that for modalists, ‘the three Persons are assigned the status of modes or manifestations of the one divine being: the one God is substantial, the three differentiations adjectival’.<sup>83</sup> Whilst both explications use the language of manifestations, it still isn’t clear to others and myself exactly what modalism amounts to.<sup>84</sup>

Due to this, and for simplicity, I shall take the popular academic book *Christian Theology* by Alister McGrath, as providing an account of modalism that I shall work from. McGrath suggests there are two types of modalism, chronological and functional. He writes,

*Chronological modalism* holds that God was Father at one point in history; that God was then Son at another point; and, finally, that God was Spirit. God thus appears in different modes at different times. [...] [Whilst] *Functional modalism* holds that God operates in different ways at the present moment, and that the three persons refer to these different modes of action.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Emery, *The Trinity*, p.60.

<sup>83</sup> Hugh E. W. Turner, (1983) ‘Modalism’, in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. by Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), p.375.

<sup>84</sup> Leftow, ‘Latin Trinity’, pp.326-327.

<sup>85</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p.245.

It seems clear to me that my model is not chronologically modalistic, since it claims all the persons of the Trinity, due to the multi-track nature of deity, are simultaneously and eternally present. One manifestation does not cease for the next to occur, rather all manifestations occur simultaneously for eternity.

Perhaps my view is closer to functional modalism, where functional modalism holds, 'God acts as creator (and we call this "Father"); God acts as redeemer (and we call this "Son"); God acts as sanctifier (and we call this the "Holy Spirit")'. The persons of the Trinity thus refer to different divine functions.'<sup>86</sup> Yet my account doesn't say the persons of the trinity are different functions of the trope deity. Rather my account holds that the one trope deity has three manifestations, since it is a multi-track power, where each of these just is the trope deity in actuality. Therefore, my position holds that the manifestations are both eternal and necessary, thereby avoiding the errors of Sabellianism. The account also suggests that we should think of the three manifestations, each as persons, although as I noted earlier, I leave the notion of personhood largely unexplained. Further, my view allows that the Son can pray to the Father without praying to himself, since even though Father and Son share the same trope deity, they are distinct since they are different tracks of the manifestation of deity. This is especially evident as my account allows for distinct consciousnesses, and therefore the consciousness of the praying Son would be distinct from the Father's hearing consciousness. Given this, I don't take my model to be modalistic, at least on McGrath's construal of modalism.

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<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*

## Conclusion

‘For the Christian, the true “Theory of Everything” is Trinitarian theology,’<sup>87</sup> and this paper has attempted to provide a LT model of this doctrine. My model affirms (1), since there is only one God due to there being only one deity trope. It also holds (2) as it claims Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all deity in actuality. Yet it further supports (3), since Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not identical because their manifestations are different, thanks to deity being multi-track with differing manifestation conditions. Finally, my conception upholds (4), since the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each just the multi-track manifestation of the deity trope in actuality. If this is all correct then my model is successful in providing another LT account. However, one might suggest the theses don’t combine as I hoped, or worse, that some of them are false. Perhaps a stronger accusation might be made suggesting that if my model follows from these theses, then this should be taken as a *reductio* of at least one of them. As stated previously, showing these theses to be true is one task too many for an already ambitious paper, and therefore demonstrating this model to be entirely satisfactory requires further metaphysical work. Nevertheless, since I take the possibility of these theses for granted, I rest somewhat content with my more limited conclusion.

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<sup>87</sup> John Polkinghorne, ‘The Demise of Democritus’, in *The Trinity and an Entangled World*, ed. by John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p.12.